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THE
DIGNITY OF LABOR.

LECTURE TO THE YOUNG,

—:) DELIVERED BY THE (:—

REV. ROBERT CHRISTIE,

OF LEXINGTON, KENTUCKY.

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REV. ROBERT CHRISTIE,

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This Lecture, which was received with unusual favor by those to whom it was originally delivered, having been incidentally forwarded to intimate friends of its gifted author, in this city, they have taken this method of circulating it, that others may have the privilege of perusing what is so admirably adapted to the demands of these times.

HAMILTON, February 1879.

TEXT.—“Work with your own hands.—1st Thess. IV. 11.

Although Paul was moved by the greatest religious enthusiasm, he was one of the most practical of men. Intently occupied with spiritual things, he never lost sight of man's earthly relations and his bodily necessities. Dr. Chalmers has pointed out as a proof of Newton's greatness, that he never indulged in mere speculations about the condition of things on the other planets. He didn't lend the influence of his great name to the conjectures of small philosophers, who were trying to prove that the other worlds were inhabited, and to show what

must be the peculiarities and institutions of the people. He studied and described the laws of the universe, and left others to build up their fanciful systems. There are similar proofs of Paul's greatness. He was moving great masses of men everywhere. He was the herald of truths that were to change the whole face of society ; but you never find him setting on foot Utopian schemes, which promised deliverance from the hardships and labors of life. He does not establish communities that are to have their own laws, where the family relation is to be broken up for the common good, and where they are to have all things in common. He never tampers with the rights of property, nor does he brand all government as tyranny. He presents no ideal state of society in which there will be no need for hard bodily toil, where all shall be engaged in the pleasures of study. He has left no "Brook Farm" or "Harmony Hall " as monuments of his folly.

He does not call upon men to leave their farms, their workshops, and their merchandise, that they may give themselves wholly to the cultivation of their intellects and the salvation of their souls. He never speaks of the drudgery or degradation of manual labor. Nor is freedom from bodily toil ever spoken of as something either to be hoped for or aimed at. The hard hand and muscular arm, the moisture on the brow of toil and the begrimed face of the mechanic are not pointed to as seals of degradation. Paul's deep interest in the souls of men never blinded him to the claims of their bodies which must be fed and clothed by the fruits of la-

bor. Religion could never supply these necessities. Hence those who embraced the new doctrines were not called upon to leave their old employments but were exhorted rather to prosecute them with new diligence, that they might be models of industry and honesty to the heathen around them. Nay, he declared that the man who did not "provide for his own and especially those of his own household, was worse than an infidel." He commanded them "to work with their own hands, that they may walk honestly towards them that are without, and that they may lack for nothing." This command implies—

1. *That work is a Primary duty.* It is personal also—"Work with your *own* hand." It cannot be denied there is a wide spread impression in this democratic country where differences of rank are not supposed to exist, that there is something degrading in manual labor. It is regarded as a bar to good social standing. The man who strips his coat to earn a living is esteemed a grade below the genteel loafer. That impression exists in the minds of multitudes and is nowhere more prevalent than among the children of workingmen. They have come to think that the way to social position is to wear fine clothes, no matter how procured, and to avoid the drudgery of labor. Hence, the great number of young men who have no visible means of support, who are leeches on a father's industry and mother's self-denial; hence, the growing throng of applicants for such agencies as promise a livelihood without the necessity of laboring with the hands. The manager of a large machine manufacto-

ry told me not long ago that it was the rarest thing to find what he called an American boy learning a trade in their establishment. They had to look to the sons of foreign-born citizens for a supply of apprentices. And I saw a striking confirmation of this statement not long ago in one of our illustrated papers. On one page was a cut representing a large and magnificent building. In the window was an advertisement for a clerk. It was early morning and the store was not yet open, but there were about fifty young men congregated and jostling each other that they might make application. On the opposite page was a blacksmith's shop with an advertisement for a hand. There sat on the doorstep a solitary applicant, whose Celtic features betrayed his nationality. It is not my purpose to attempt to trace the causes that have produced this state of things. I shall content myself with pointing to a few self-evident truths, that prove that it is wrong, and leads to the most pernicious consequences.

A great man has said : " There are only three ways of getting a living—by working, by begging, or by stealing. " Those who do not work, disguise it in whatever pretty language we please, are doing one of the other two. If there be anything that can be conceded without argument, it is that all the food supplies must come from the soil and the sea; and to procure these; men must plow the furrow and the wave. These products come only through labor and the man who is to enjoy them, must either put forth that labor, or give, in some form, an equivalent that represents labor. To be an

honest consumer, one must be an honest producer. The body has no claim to sustenance, save on the condition that it give back an equivalent in the shape of honest industry. The Apostle states the principle in these words: "He that will not work, neither should he eat." It is another form of stating the words uttered at the gates of Eden "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread." The conditions of life have not changed since then. The material wants of the body are as numerous and imperious as ever, and the world has not accumulated a surplus of bread, to be given away to those who refuse to earn it. You often hear the idler flippantly announce that the world owes him a living. It would be interesting to know by what course of meritorious conduct he has laid the world under this great obligation. I can understand how the weed claims that the earth owes it its nourishment, for it helps to keep the atmosphere pure and sweet—but I am unable to see how the idler benefits society. You might as well tell me that the body owes the cancer its sustenance, as that the world owes the loafer his living. They are both alike—cankers preying upon the life of the bodies upon which they have fastened.

The youth who starts out with the resolve to avoid honest toil, either with hand or brain, is violating the very first law of duty. Ask yourselves for what the hand, that wonderful piece of mechanism, was created. Was it created to wear fine kids all the year round? Is it simply a convenient receptacle for the gifts of others? Is it something to be hidden away in the pockets from morning till night? No.

It was created to do, as well as to direct; to give, as well as to receive. It was created to hold the plow, to swing the hammer, to throw the shuttle, to drive the plane, and the pen. It was given to subdue the earth to man's uses; to cause the wilderness to bud and blossom as the rose; it was given to sow and reap, to build, and do deeds of ministration.

Our ancestors in old England, with all their faults, were not ignorant of the conditions of life. They recognized the need of body and soul. And every thoughtful father tried to put his child in the way of supplying both. Hence he taught him the Ten Commandments, and bound him an apprentice, to learn some handicraft. And with the fear of God and the ability to earn his bread, he went forth thoroughly furnished for the great battle of life. These humble accomplishments laid the foundations of England's greatness. They created those busy hives of industry, Manchester, Sheffield, and Glasgow, that send their products into all the markets of the world, and in return wealth in ten thousand streams flows back into her coffers, making her the richest country in the world.

"And the original necessities remain unchanged. The Ten Commandments are as obligatory as ever, and the practical ability, the being able to do something, must still be the backbone of the education of every boy not born to fortune." And the youth who assumes that the world owes him a living, will find difficulty in collecting the claim. He will, in the first place, lose the respect of all right thinking people; then self-respect will soon follow; and when these are gone, it needs no gift of prophecy

to predict the future. The more industry, the fewer temptations; the more leisure, the more conflicts. Says one, "Action is man's salvation, physical, mental and spiritual."

2. *Work is the path of independence.* It is not meant by *independence* that it will lift a man in every case into a position where he will be above labor, but it will preserve him from becoming a pensioner on the bounty or charity of others. It will plant him firmly on his own feet. He will cease to be a parasite, or a vine, that trusts to others for support. He will live by right, and not by suffrance. A distinguished Jewish Rabbi, who lived about the time of our Saviour, declared: "He that teaches not his son a trade does the same as if he taught him to be a thief." And Gamaliel, the teacher of Paul, said: "He that hath a trade in his hand, to what is he like? He is like a vineyard that is fenced." He is fortified against want, temptations, and adversity. Paul was noble when he lifted up his chained hands before Kings and Governors while pleading the cause of Christ; but he was equally so when he lifted them up before the elders of Ephesus, and, in the spirit of a noble independence, declared, "these hands have ministered to my necessities." He was no vagrant who had taken to preaching as a trade, he was no pensioner on the bounty of his brethren, no idler seeking to avoid labor, but he proved the absence of self interest by refusing to become burdensome to any. "I seek not yours but you," are his words. They could not stop him from preaching by withholding their gifts; there was no need to trim his instruc-

tion to suit his rich hearers. He who could address an audience of philosophers on Mar's Hill, or preach in the market place during the day, and ply his needle at tent-making at night, was not at the mercy of any man's caprice. He could speak the wholetruth without fear or favor, and eat his own bread with gladness. What an advantage it gave him in the prosecution of his grand mission. Wherever he went he could earn his bread with his own hands. While he was teaching the world he would be "burdensome to no man." Ah! says one, I want to win my bread with the products of my brain. To such I say, mere scholarship will never give a man the independence of which I speak. De Quincy, at the age of seventeen, was one of the best Greek scholars in England, and yet he would have died of hunger on a door-step, in the city of London, had not a poor woman taken him in and given him bread. Froude, the historian, addressing the students of St. Andrews, said, "It hurts no intellect to be able to make a boat, or a house, or a pair of shoes, or a suit of clothes, or hammer a horse-shoe, and if you can do either of these you have nothing to fear from fortune." He continued, "If a son of mine told me that he wished to devote himself to intellectual pursuits, I would act as I should act if he wished to make an imprudent marriage. I would absolutely forbid him for a time, till the firmness of his purpose had been tried. If he stood the test and showed real talent, I would insist that he should, in some way, make himself independent of the products of intellectual work for subsistence." He had noted the numerous failures on the part

of those who had tried to win bread and distinction by the pen, and having seen the misery that followed such failures, would guard every one against the risk.

And in this land of commercial fluctuations what assurance has the youth who seems born to wealth, that he will not sooner or later be cast upon his own exertions ? Ten thousand who had the promise of a rich inheritance five years ago, are penniless to-day. If they have attained to manhood, they begin the world at an immense disadvantage. Many of them are pitiably helpless. Like the man in the parable, they can not dig, and to beg they are ashamed. But let a youth be trained to some useful occupation and it matters not how fortunes wheel may turn, he will always land on his feet. I know a gentleman in New York whose cheque for a million would be honored on change. His prospective heir is a son. He sent him to a carpenter's shop and had him master the trade, and then sent him to a foreign university. A commercial crash may sweep away that youth's prospective inheritance, but can never leave him helpless, for that man can always stand firm who can, by his own exertions, earn a livelihood in some permanent branch of industry.

“ Ah, ” says the timid soul that has heard there is something degrading in manual labor, “ we shall lose caste if we join the ranks of the working man; we shall be *cut* by our old school fellows and the children of our wealthy neighbors. ”

What matters it, let me ask, about the opinion of the unthinking, if you have your own approval and your own self-respect ? Men might just as well " snub the sun " as to attempt to snub the man who consumes his own and asks no favors. Think of a dapper dandy making up his mind " to snub. " St. Paul because he made tents, or Spinosa because he polished lenses, or Burns because he followed the plow. The sparks that flash from the forge are just as valuable to civilization as the brightest scintillations of genius. The sounds that ring out from the anvil beneath the blows of honest industry, are as much the voice of true manhood as those that are heard pleading the cause of justice, commanding armies, or that shake the Senate. The man who by daily practice preaches honest labor, does a work as noble and honorable as the man who preaches righteousness. You may have little fear of that kind of degradation that comes from standing in the same ranks with the carpenter of Nazareth, the fishers of Galilee, the tent-maker of Tarsus, the stone-mason of Cromarty, and the plowman bard of Ayrshire.

3. *Work is the path to promotion.* The great mass born into the world inherit nothing beyond the possibilities of their humanity and the favoring elements of civilization in the place where their lot may be cast. Their parents have not the means to set them up in business, give them a college education, or leave them a fortune. They bring nothing to the race of life save their own energy. Doubtless the great majority bring with them also a desire to rise to some position of influence. This thirst is

natural and noble. The bosom that has it not lacks one of the greatest incentives to action. It often gives "a sweet, painful pleasure," but it alone

"Is fitted to impart
An hour's importance to a poor man's heart."

To the great mass who stand at the opening of life with this longing, but without the inherited aids to gratify it, the question arises, How shall we shape our course so as to gain influence and distinction? I answer, the youth who makes himself master of some useful branch of industry, plants his foot firmly on the first round of the ladder of advancement. Having gained the first, the second is easy. I care not how humble the branch of business may be, there is not a trade or branch of labor that some man has not made the stepping stone to wealth to influence, to greatness. Andrew Johnson went from the tailor's board to the Presidential chair; Burnside rose from the same level; Henry Wilson went to the President's chair from the shoemaker's bench, and MacKenzie, late Premier of Canada, was once a stone-mason. Therefore, if you would advance, get a trade, no matter what, for you will leap further from the lowest branch than from a dead level. Don't wait for a change of outward circumstances. Don't waste your time lamenting your humble lot or blaming your sad fate. That old Roman spoke the truth who said, "The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars, but in ourselves, that we are underlings." Archimedes said, "Give me a standing place and I will move the world." And a great many young men are content to

echo the wish of the philosopher. They say, "Give me a place suitable to my ability, and I will exert an influence." Goethe says to all such, "Make good thy standing place and move the world." You must be rooted firmly in your own strength before you move or influence anybody. Only a weakling has to be *lifted* into any position. The youth who is industrious, intelligent, temperate, and persevering, holds the keys to all positions. He it is—

"Who makes by force his merit known,
And lives to clutch the golden keys,
To mould a mighty State's decrees,
And shape the whispers of the Throne.

And moving up from high to higher,
Becomes on fortunes' frowning slope,
The Pillar of a people's hope,
The centre of a world's desire."

Who is it that "shapes the whispers" of the English throne at the present day? Is it not Benjamin Disraeli? Well, at the age when young men of fortune are sent to college, he was apprenticed to a Solicitor, to fit him for a government clerkship. In due time he won reputation by his pen, and at thirty-two, a seat in the House of Commons. The first time he spoke he excited so much laughter by an *outré* manner and extravagant gestures, that he became disconcerted and abruptly sat down, but not before he had uttered the remarkable prophecy, "I have begun many things seven times, and have succeeded at last. I shall sit down now, but the time will come when you will hear me." He knew the power was in him and he resolved to make it felt. And the other day, after dictating

the Treaty of Berlin, his sword and coronet were hung up in the Royal Chapel at Windsor beside those of the proudest nobility of England. The name of that once humble Jew will go down to future generations by the side of Pitt, Peel and Palmerston. But there are many who think if they have to labor ten hours a day with their hands there will be no time for mental improvement. But is it so? Was it not while Hugh Miller was earning his bread as a stonemason that he fitted himself to become the leading geologist of his time, and the writer of as pure English as has been written in any time? Was it not while earning his bread by book-binding that Faraday educated himself to win all the honors that are offered for scientific discovery? Whoever has stood on Prince's street, Edinburgh, has gazed on Walter Scott's monument which is a perfect poem in stone. It is one of the greatest products of art of this or any other century. The design for that "thing of beauty" was furnished by George Kemp, who at the time was working at the carpenter's bench in Ayrshire. It did not come to him by inspiration; it was not revealed to him in a dream. It represents intense labor. He had, while a mere youth, walked on foot, working as he went, into England, to study all the finest specimens of Gothic architecture, and that "miracle in stone" is the fruit of that humble labor. It will bear favorable comparison with the celebrated tower of Giotto, proudly called "the Lile of Florence." Within the last eighteen months a young mechanic in Louisville has

taken high rank in scientific authorship by publishing a book on "The Ferns of Kentucky." The plates by which it is illustrated were made by his own hands.

Let these well-known examples refute the notion that manual labor is necessarily a bar to intellectual culture. It is the wise use of leisure hours and holidays that places distance between one man and another. I spent a short time last summer at the Glen House in the White Mountains. The tables of that hotel were all served by thirty-five young men, who were students from the various colleges of New England. I was told by one of them that there were a hundred and thirty-five students acting in the same capacity in the various hotels in the mountains. Were those young men degraded because they had donned the white apron that they might win a diploma? In a few years from now the same hands that were placing "side dishes" before the guests in that summer resort will be writing briefs, prescriptions, and sermons, handing diplomas to students of colleges over which they preside, or as Presidents of the United States, distributing patronage to an army of office seekers. I know whereof I speak when I affirm that any young man in this land, of average capacity, self-denial, and perseverance, who has a trade at eighteen, may, by his own unaided efforts, have a college education at twenty-six. There are at least six hours out of every twenty-four at a workingman's disposal, to be wasted on trifles or put to good use. And the young

mechanic or laborer who is seeking to elevate himself, must use that portion of precious time as the lever. These hours may be wrought into crystal steps by which to ascend into intelligence and honor.

Let me say, in conclusion, we have heard a good deal of late about hard times, and we shall hear far more in the future, unless the youth of this community learn these two simple truths, namely, that manual labor is not degrading, and economy is not meanness. Then, if you would be found in the path of duty, Work ; if you would tread the path of Independence, Work ! Work if you would climb to a position of honor. For, varying the language of the poet,—

“The soul that can
Render an honest and industrious man
Commands all influence, all fate :
Nothing, to him, falls early, or too late ;
Our acts, our angels are, or good or ill,
Our fatal shadows that walk by us still.”





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